

By Lawrence Meyer
Washington Post Staff Writers

8/1/75

The head of the General Accounting Office opened the new House intelligence committee's hearings yesterday with testimony that his congressional watchdog agency does not know how much the United States spends on intelligence or whether some intelligence-gathering functions are unnecessarily duplicated.

The appearance by Comptroller General Elmer B. Staats was designed by committee chairman Otis Pike (D-N.Y.) to dramatize congress's lack of sufficient information to exercise its responsibility for monitoring the activities of the intelligence community.

Staats told the committee that the GAO stopped auditing the Central Intelligence Agency's expenditures in 1962 after being unable to obtain adequate information for a comprehensive review.

In general, Staats testified, GAO watchdogs have difficulty getting information from all the other intelligence agencies—the National Security Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the intelligence components of the military, the FBI, the Treasury Department, the State Department and the Energy Resource and Development Administration. He cited statutory restrictions, difficulty in getting security clearances for GAO personnel and the lack of legal authority for the GAO to command answers to its questions.

Pike told reporters after the committee's first day of public hearings that he personally already has "some figures on the different agencies," although the committee has not yet been given the information.

Pike said there was "no question" that committee members "will get those numbers." But he left unclear how far he intended to go in sharing information with other members of the House. Under rules of the House, any member has a right to information held by a committee. Pike indicated, however, that the House rules do not cover information given by an agency to an individual member.

Asked whether the decision was his or the unnamed aides' to treat the information given him as personal rather than for the committee, Pike replied, "I will say that it's a determination made jointly."

Staats' inability to answer many of the committee's questions about intelligence expenditures came as no surprise to Pike. "I wanted to get it on the record," he told reporters. "Mr. Staats has demonstrated rather clearly that the comptroller general is unable to exercise oversight functions over the intelligence community."

Yesterday's hearings, coming only two weeks after the House scrapped its original 10-member committee for the current 13-member group under Pike's chairmanship, marked the first in a series of sessions. Pike said he plans to hold in public. Office of Management and Budget Director James T. Lynn is scheduled to testify today.

In his opening statement, Staats referred to the "estimates of others" that the annual intelligence budget is 2 to 5 per cent of the federal budget—a range of \$7 billion to \$17.5 billion. Asked by Pike if the GAO knows how much the United States spends on intelligence, Staats replied, "No, sir, we do not."

In reply to a question from Pike on duplication of intelligence activities, Staats said, "We would have no way of finding out, Mr. Chairman. Without having a way of determining what the money is or where the people are, we would have no way of determining whether there is duplication or not."

Although the first hearing went relatively smoothly, Pike and the committee's ranking minority member, Rep. Robert McClory (R-Ill.), exchanged words after McClory attempted to block a series of question by Rep. Ronald V. Dellums (D-Calif.) about the CIA.

McClory's action was criticized by Rep. Robert N. Giaimo (D-Conn.), who said that part of the problem in the past with congressional oversight has been a "pre-disposition on the part of Congress to impose our own cloak of secrecy."

Pike told McClory "flatly" that Staats "is wholly capable of taking care of himself." McClory replied that he wanted it made "perfectly emphatic" that he would object when a witness is asked questions that will violate confidentiality.

A-2 Friday, August 1, 1975 THE WASHINGTON POST

GAO Is Unable To Give Costs Of Intelligence